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[This is the web site of the reconstituted Socialist Party of Great Britain who were expelled from the Clapham-based Socialist Party in May 1991 for using the name "The Socialist Party of Great Britain" in our propaganda as required by Clause 6 of The Object and Declaration of Principles formulated in 1904 to which we agree. We reconstituted ourselves as The Socialist Party of Great Britain in June 1991. Any money given to us for literature or support is in recognition that we are not the Clapham based Socialist Party at 52 Clapham High Street and any mistakes will be rectified.]

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Is Oil A Problem?

Capitalism, not Oil, is the Problem

For most of the 20th century, oil was intimately related to plunder, pollution and war. As a commodity oil has always presented the capitalist class and its political agents with a problem. Oil has become a problem product, a problem of location, a problem of access and a problem of securing its trade routes. The recent terrorist problem in Saudi Arabia only served to highlight the unpredictability of the oil market and how precarious oil's security, production and transport are throughout the world.

Can capitalism sustain its voracious use of energy? If the US is the mirror image that the rest of the capitalist world aspires to, then environmentalists claim that it is this capitalist utopia which is equivalent to the energy consumption of seven planet Earths. Overall the US is way out in front, with 2.3bn metric tonnes of oil (or equivalent) consumed for commercial purposes in 2001.

The EU 15 and China are on similar terms, both consuming about half of the US amount, whereas India consumes about a quarter of America's amount. The rapid growth of developing capitalist countries like China and India is putting a tremendous strain on energy supply (WORLD BANK, June 2004). Higher energy prices, national rivalry, blocs pumping oil to favoured countries at the expense of others, the political instability of existing resources: all point to a coming century of war and civil unrest in which the working class will be the losers.

Pollution caused by oil has also been a problem for the capitalist class, particularly when one capitalist state pollutes another. The International Maritime Organisation has highlighted the numerous international treaties since the 1950's enacted to try to prevent oil spillage and environmental problems. The pollution persists in spite of design methods and technology which could be used to prevent oil spillage and dumping at sea. An academic, Sue Haile of the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, noted that:

Over 2.5 billion tonnes of oil is used around the world every year, and 3 million tonnes is discharged to the ocean as a result of accidents. 30% of the world input of petrochemical hydrocarbons enters the sea from rivers and 45% from vessel operations and accidents ... In 1983 oil was the cause of 40% of the serious freshwater pollution incidents which were so bad that water treatment works had to shut down.

NOTES ON OIL POLLUTION, November 2000

While accidents, like oil spillage, might occur in Socialism, they will not be a result of commercial interests and the pursuit of profit. Nor will they be as a result of the anarchic unplanned commodity production which blights the world. Nor will Socialism be burdened with international rivalries which force oil to be taken by sea when safer and more environmentally beneficial routes would be available. The illegal flushing out of tanks in the ocean, the Torrey Canyon running aground in 1967, the 1989 Exxon Valdez incident, and the 1993 Braer oil spillage: these and other incidents all resulted from the commercial imperatives placed upon shipping. Current energy use is set within a context of competition, markets and profit-making - anti-social practices which Socialism will not be burdened with.

Capitalism Causes Pollution

In Nigeria, production of oil, discovered in the Niger some 40 years ago, is having a devastating affect on that country's largest wetland region. Families living among the oil fields are breathing in methane gas and having to cope with frequent oil leaks. Last year about 10,000 barrels of oil were spilt in the nine states that make up the Niger Delta (BBC NEWS, 23 June 2004). For Shell and the Nigerian Government, profit is the driving force not human considerations. Strikes, government repression, bribery and corruption, violence, police brutality and pollution characterise oil production for profit in Nigeria.

And what are the results of new pipelines when the over-riding factor is profit and the pursuit of the interests of the capitalist class in protecting trade routes, strategic areas of importance and the supply of raw resources? In an article "*Hidden costs of pipeline meant to safeguard West's oil supply*" (INDEPENDENT, 26 June 2004), we are told that the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, cutting through Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan from the Caspian Sea to Turkey's Mediterranean coast, has meant:

- On the final section of the pipe to Ceyhan, cancer risks to the workers who applied coatings that contained highly carcinogenic compounds without air-filter masks, although there was a warning about the product;
- To save time and money the storage tankers at the Ceyhan terminal were designed without proper drainage, meaning that toxins flow into the ground;
- Builders cut through local water supplies and flooded farmland with sediment;
- Natural wildlife and important natural landscapes have been and are being destroyed.

Why the pollution, the destruction of the environment and the risk to workers? THE INDEPENDENT report tells us that the reasons are profit, trade routes and strategic considerations:

By 2010 the Caspian region could produce 3.7 million barrels per day. This could fill a large hole in world supplies as world oil demand is expected to grow from 76 million a day in 2000 to 118.9 billion by 2020 ... When it is complete next year, the pipeline will pump 4.2 million barrels a year, easing the US's reliance on the unstable Gulf States for oil.

Western capitalism wants to be less dependent on the Middle East. The oil is important for commodity production and exchange for profit. These are the important considerations under capitalism, not human need. And all the environmentalist groups were powerless to stop this pollution, environmental damage and serious injury to workers occurring. The failure of the environmentalist lobby demonstrated that reforms are not the answer. Nor is pleading to capitalist states, the World Bank, the IMF and the United Nations. All that wasted effort should have been spent abolishing capitalism, not vainly trying to make it something it can never become. When future wars and conflicts hit this area, the cause will be oil and capitalism's demand for oil.

Reforms Are Not The Answer

Capitalism is a polluting social system, and generates unimaginable waste in the way it produces and exchanges

commodities for a profit. The oil consumed by weapons manufacturing, war production, armed conflict, government bureaucracy, commerce, banking, advertising, accountancy, what passes for the 'leisure' industry, the irrational patterns of employment imposed on the working class forcing workers to sit repetitively in traffic jams going to and from their place of exploitation, is all a sheer waste of energy.

Capitalism needs this waste for the production and circulation of commodities and money transactions. A Socialist society doesn't. What socialist production will be used for will only be to meet social needs, which can be done rationally and efficiently without markets and financial institutions. The environmental lobby passes over in silence the fact that waste and pollution are caused by capitalism, private property ownership, the market, and the buying and selling of commodities. They cannot think beyond capitalism.

Increasingly, there have been anxious commentaries on the depletion of oil. In a book, *THE PARTY'S OVER: OIL, WAR AND THE FATE OF INDUSTRIAL SOCIETIES* (2003), Richard Heinberg warns that capitalism is about to change dramatically and permanently as a result of oil depletion. Within the next few years, he writes, the fall in the global production of oil will mean advanced and developing capitalist countries will have less energy available for the pursuit of profit.

Richard Heinberg shows how oil and war have been closely related throughout the 20th century and will continue to be in the 21st century, so long as the working class allow capitalism to remain in existence. He shows how competition to control oil supplies is likely to lead to new resource wars in the Middle East, Central Asia and South America. It is interesting to note that the book was written before the recent oil war in Iraq, and while the CIA were busy destabilising the elected President in Venezuela to protect US oil interests. Venezuela's oil amounts to about 90 per cent of its exports, and 60 per cent of this exported oil is supplied to the US (*THE ECONOMIST POCKET WORLD IN FIGURES*, 2003).

The problem for capitalist nations has been one of supply. Although there are other forms of energy sources, oil still drives capitalist production. And there is the apparent problem of oil depletion. We are told by environmentalists that there is a looming energy crisis which faces us all.

However, the question of fossil fuels, where to find them and what to do about them, is not the urgent problem it is claimed to be. The problem is not that the oil is running out but that capitalism systematically wastes so much oil and other resources for the pursuit of profit and capital accumulation. BP's annual *STATISTICAL REVIEW OF WORLD ENERGY* stated that oil reserves worldwide were little changed in 2003, being helped by new deposits in Russia and the viability of extracting from Canada's tar sands. BP believes oil reserves will last 41 years. Proven global reserves were 1.147 million barrels (*INDEPENDENT*, 19 June 2004).

BP's oil supply figures indicate that the problem of depletion is a real one, although companies like BP are part of the problem not the solution. Here is some of BP's contribution to the environment. In February 1991, a 300,000-gallon spill from a BP-chartered oil tanker spread for 20 square miles and severely disrupted the environment of nearby Huntington beach in California, home of free market economics. In July 1988 the Piper Alpha disaster led to strikes on North Sea oil rigs. Workers wanted union recognition and improved safety. BP did not agree and started to recruit non-union labour. In the 1990's, two explosions in BP's Grangemouth refinery cost the lives of three workers. Between 1985-9, BP received contracts from the Ministry of Defence for more than £100 million. So too did its other competitors on the world oil market.

The optimism by BP, one of capitalism's leading oil companies (record profits in 2003 of £9.75 bn, and dubious environmental and social practices throughout the world), sits awkwardly with the Cassandra in the environmental lobby whose predictions about oil depletion are wholly pessimistic. We are told by ecologists that oil production will peak any time between now and 2015 (Paul Roberts, *THE END OF OIL*, 2004) and that consumption of fossil fuels is beginning to change the world's climate.

Production for Use and not Profit

Environmentalists like Paul Roberts tend to miss the real economic cause of this change. The despoliation of the world's environment is a by-product of decades of commodity production and exchange for profit about which the

environmental lobby remains mute. Like all reformers Roberts believes that you can have capitalism without the effects of capitalism - a green and environmentally friendly capitalism. You can't.

THE END OF OIL offers no solutions to energy depletion because the author cannot think beyond the market. There is an answer to the environmental problems we face but not one offered by Paul Roberts. He does not tackle the basic question of ownership and control. The private property ownership of oil, either by private companies or the State, goes unquestioned. A start would be for the working class to stop looking to politicians to resolve problems of energy depletion and pollution. Politicians are mentally imprisoned by a world of markets, buying and selling, and profit-making. They cannot challenge the existence of nation states and the property interests found within those countries. International agreements which try to limit the damage capitalism is doing to the planet take the profit system as an unquestioned given. And in protecting oil interests the State will attack the working class.

Environmentalists bewail the fact that legislation is passed but the pollution continues or they come up against well-financed interest groups with sophisticated PR advisors and bought scientists claiming that environmental damage is not really taking place. Treaties have to negotiate the realities of *real politik* and conflicting national interests. They end up as a fudge and, when leading capitalist countries like the US do not sign up to a treaty, nothing can be done.

To protect and further the interest of the capitalist class is what governments are about. They are the "*executive of the bourgeoisie*". They do not serve the interests of the working class. That governments serve the interests of capital was noted by Paul Roberts. The Labour Government, for example, pressurised the Office of National Statistics to omit, from its report on the environment, figures which showed sharp increases in greenhouse gas emissions from air and freight transport, to support the commercial interests of these sectors of the economy. So much for the Labour Party's "*green credentials*" and its leading environmentalist "*champion*", Jonathan Porritt. The Labour Government preaches to the working class the virtue of spending Sunday mornings at a local recycling depot putting glass in bottle banks but slavishly supports the interests of polluting industries because of the pressures of world competition and profitability.

The answer to environmental problems is to look with a sober disposition at the cause of resource depletion, waste and pollution. That requires a questioning and rejection of markets, buying and selling, price mechanisms, the profit motive, private property ownership, and nation states. In short, it means simultaneously to question politically, and to reject, capitalism. The answer to environmental problems is consciously and politically to establish a social system in which production will take place just to meet human needs, and where production will be rationally planned to ensure that the environmental impact of producing goods and services is kept to a minimum.

The framework for an environmentally responsive form of production has to be Socialism. Only the framework of common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution can allow the pressing social problems caused by capitalism to be tackled and resolved. What prevents the problem of resource depletion and pollution from being addressed is private property ownership and the profit motive. The revolutionary agents necessary to solve the problems caused by capitalism are not the reformers but the working class.

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Hard Choices?

Capitalists who '*down-size*', '*restructure*' and '*de-layer*' and politicians who remove services and make cuts in budgets say that they have to make "*hard choices*". They say there is no alternative. Pain today, pleasure tomorrow. Yet tomorrow never comes. Under capitalism the working class are in constant pain: the pain of exploitation, the pain of having to struggle to make ends meet, and the pain of being at the receiving end of problems caused by capitalism - problems like insecurity, unemployment, war, poverty and social alienation.

The Labour Government of 1997 said they had "*hard choices*" to make. This meant further attacks on the unemployed and those on benefits. And it meant further attacks on the trade unions and the working class.

The working class in Germany have also been told that they face hard choices. The depression there has lasted for

over a decade with millions unemployed. Governments have not been able to turn the economy around. Now workers have been told that German capitalism can only compete against other countries if there is a '*flexible labour market*'. The Labour market is to be '*liberalised*'. But not '*liberalised*' in the interests of the working class. When markets are '*liberalised*' it is in the interests of those consuming labour power, not of those selling it. Workers are going to lose their "*generous benefits*" - as if capitalism is ever generous to the working class. Unemployment benefits are to be cut and there will be charges for doctors' visits, but tax cuts for the rich (INDEPENDENT, 28 Feb.04). The labour market is in fact a prison. A place of coercion.

For politicians, capitalists come first in the queue. This was seen recently in Blair's dash to Libya in pursuit of lucrative contracts for British capitalism. His handshakes were with wealthy commercial contractors, not the poor and politically brutalised majority who live in Libya. No Maoists went to China with Blair, only hard-nosed businessmen. They saw the Chinese working class as a source of cheap labour, of exploitation and of profit.

Politicians believe that capitalism only works well if and when it suits capitalists to invest, in other words, if conditions promise good profits for them. Only then, they say, will factories be built, workers employed and production take place. Therefore, in making choices, governments can only attack the working class. And when they make "*hard choices*" governments only attack the working class harder. When capitalists introduce labour-saving machinery, it is not for the benefit of workers but to get rid of them.

So, the expression "*hard choices*" is utterly bogus. The assumption is that decisions are made from the nuances of balancing the needs of competing priorities for finite monetary resources. Public choice theory, blown into Britain from the US, imposes on governments the discipline of a '*benign market framework*' working for the public good - which, when translated into plain English, means the good of the capitalist class. '*Market populism*' it is called, or '*rational choice theory*' as it is referred to by the market fundamentalists who advocate this particular ruling class doctrine.

Public choice theory is all the rage in Whitehall. This is because politicians and their economic advisors take it as axiomatic that economics is all about "*the allocation of scarce resources among infinite competing wants*" (any economics text book). This denies from the very start that it would ever be conceivably possible to have social arrangements where there is no scarcity and where enough is produced to meet all human needs. How convenient.

Yet the market is not benign. It is destructive. "*Creative destruction*", the economist Schumpeter once called it. Markets fail. And when they fail there is bankruptcy, unemployment and social pain for those involved.

Perfect markets with perfect information inducing rational consumers to make rational choices in perfect harmony and equilibrium only exist within apologetic economics textbooks. But the real world of capitalism is not like that. Socialists do not begin from absurd assumptions but from the capitalist system that confronts the working class. We do not impose a perfect theory on reality but our theory comes out of the reality we experience as a subject class. And as workers we know that the wages system rations what we can and cannot have.

Scarcity under capitalism is deliberate scarcity. Capitalist production only takes place if there is a profit to be made. No profit means no production. The deliberate destruction of food stuffs, the restrictions on the amount of food being produced, the irrationality of the common agricultural policy which takes farm land out of production and pays farmers not to grow food: all these show how wrong the assumption of economic scarcity is. Under capitalism, scarcity is invented.

And there is a further point Socialists make against capitalism. The class relations of production - the fact that the capitalist class own the means of production to the exclusion of the rest of society - hold back and restrain the forces of production. As a result, we have nearly a billion workers unemployed throughout the world with billions more starving. In a rational social system, labour would be usefully engaged in producing for those who need food. Not under capitalism. Capitalists cannot employ the unemployed workers because there is no profit, and cannot feed the billions left starving because they have not got the money to buy commodities, commodities which then have to be destroyed to maintain markets and prices.

What society could produce is restrained by the profit motive. And capitalism has the potential to produce enough food, housing, energy and so on in abundance, that is, to meet the needs of all society. The forces of production - the

raw resources, co-operative social labour, the techniques of production: all these could be used to solve the vast array of social problems facing the world today. Capitalism is not interested in meeting human needs. Capitalism is not interested in producing enough food, shelter, clothing and health care for everyone.

So choice under capitalism means a choice constrained and delimited by the market, which for the working class is no choice at all. The only consumer capitalism is interested in is a paying consumer. Profit is everything. Choice is only market choice. For billions of people outside the limits of market choice, it means starvation, death through disease and blighted lives. And for the working class as market consumers, it is a form of rationing which forces them to buy, using what they receive in terms of wages and salaries. Market choice for the working class under capitalism is an illusion. In the labour market they have to sell their labour-power or starve. The labour market, the wages system, is exploitative and coercive. Wage slavery.

There is never any "*hard choice*" to be made by the capitalist class. They live a life of comfort and privilege. The "*hard choices*" fall on the working class, whether it is the shutting down of swimming pools in Hackney, the reduction of state hand-outs to one-parent families on sink housing estates, or cutting back unemployment benefit. When politicians say "*we are going to make some hard choices*", workers know that collectively or individually they are going to be kicked in the face. And it is because, under capitalism, reforms can be taken away as quickly as they are given, that reformism is a futile and pointless political gesture.

The range of choice for the capitalist class is not hard. They are free to choose a life of privilege and comfort from the exploitation of the working class. The economist, Professor Milton Friedman, advisor to dictators, an academic gunslinger who now admits that all his theories were wrong, wrote a book praising the employers' freedom to choose. He called his book FREEDOM TO CHOOSE. He forgot to add that for the working class the only choice they have under capitalism is the freedom to lose, the freedom to be a subservient and exploited class of wage slaves.

The capitalist class feel good. With the choice available to capitalists in education, healthcare, food, houses and so on, who can blame them? They are pampered by politicians with moist lips. They have their Panglossian defenders in the media like Will Hutton, who cries out from his perch, "*we are living in the best of times, in the best of all possible worlds*" (THE OBSERVER, 22 Feb.2004).

Hutton is proud to be "*pro-capitalist*" and he is rewarded with access to the media denied to socialists, appointment to plum jobs on government quangos, and the odd academic appointment here and there. For class traitors there is always the prospect of 30 pieces of capital. Let us not forget that German capitalism was the capitalist model that Hutton, in his dreadful book, "THE STATE WE ARE IN", wanted Tony Blair to follow. Just when Hutton praised German capitalism, its economy went into free fall. His stakeholder idea has been derided as unworkable by the Blair government and trade unions alike. The TUC has now dropped the absurd belief that there can be a "*partnership*" between unions and the employers (THE TIMES, 1 March 2003).

Hutton's servile chain binds him to the interests of capital. His chain of servitude is made of 16-carat gold. His food bowl is filled with tasty morsels from their table. His clipped wings flatter his owners, fanning them with his own self-delusions about the system which imprisons him in a gilded cage. If capitalism is the answer for Will Hutton, then it must have been a bloody stupid question.

The "*hard choices*" made by politicians are made only within the context of commodity production and exchange for profit, and the profit-making priorities of capitalism. For the working class this is no choice at all since the decisions of politicians can only be made in the interests of capitalism as a whole or the particular interests of key sections of the capitalist class. The working class has no interest in capitalism. Capitalism can never be made to run in the interests of the working class.

The working class does have a choice. The working class can choose to stop voting for capitalist politicians - Labour, the Green Party, the Lib Dem Party and the Conservatives. Workers can choose to become socialists. Workers can choose to join a Socialist Party, like The SPGB. And workers can choose to replace capitalism with Socialism, choose to replace the profit system with production for use.

The choice is easy. And the choice is yours. Only the working class has the choice either to establish Socialism consciously and politically or to continue to live as an exploited, subject class of wage slaves.

... the Labour Party in seeking mass support had to attract people who did not want capitalism changed but merely changes in capitalism. From that moment their ideals were not merely hampered but hamstrung. The need for popular support came into conflict with their avowed aims. The Labour Party by thus accepting this society was forced to work for it, not against it. So it repeats the age long story of social reformism, the bartering of its beliefs and ideals for votes.

SOCIALIST STANDARD, September 1954.

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Democracy In The Trade Unions

For many years governments, the media and members of trade unions have concerned themselves with the way unions manage their internal affairs. Some of the concern, particularly that of union members, has been simply about establishing democratic methods but there were other motives behind the Tory government's Acts of Parliament during the 1980s requiring ballots for the establishment of the "*closed shop*", for the election of union officials, for renewing the unions' right to have political funds, and for ballots to be held for strike action.

Failure to hold pre-strike ballots rendered unions liable to legal action for damages brought by employers and to other financial penalties. The Tory government of the time made no secret of their intention, by these Acts, to curb and weaken the unions. The Tory Party and the Liberal Democrats also hoped that some of the ballots about the political levy would vote to end the levy and the Labour Party, dependent on most of its income from that source, would be in difficulties. In line with the pattern since the unions were first legalised, of alternate tightening and relaxing of the laws governing them, the Labour Party hoped to gain votes at a future general election by its pledge to repeal these Acts. Much to the annoyance of the trade unions, once in power the Labour Government did not repeal the Acts but merely continued the actions of past Labour Governments in its assault on the trade unions by using troops to break strikes and to support the interests of business. Not surprisingly, some unions wondered why they should use their political levy to support an openly hostile and anti-working class political party.

The anti-trade union legislation of the 1980s is worth some comment. Some Tory politicians supported compulsory strike ballots in the naïve belief that this would reduce the number of strikes. It hasn't. The Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, in its 1968 Report, had already said this was a fallacious view. It had looked at American experience and noted "*that strike ballots are overwhelmingly likely to go in favour of strike actions*" (par. 428). The Tories were not the first government to consider compulsory strike ballots. The Wilson Labour Government of 1964-1970 adopted *In Place of Strife*, drawn up by Barbara Castle, as the basis for an Industrial Relations Act. For official strikes it took the same line as the Royal Commission, but with an additional argument:

In major disputes union members are very often more militant than their leaders and are likely to be less closely in touch with the progress and prospects of the negotiations. If the union leaders were always obliged to hold a ballot when using the strike threat in negotiations, they might well find their hands tied by a vote to strike in support of a claim intended merely as a bargaining move at an early stage of negotiation. If on the other hand the union leaders are ready to call a strike without backing by their members but there is no doubt about their support, nothing would be gained by demanding a ballot (par. 97).

It proposed, however, that if a major official strike involved "*a serious threat to the economy or the public interest*" and it was doubtful whether the union's members were in favour of the strike, the Secretary of State should have power to order a ballot. After the unions had objected to parts of *In Place of Strife*, an Industrial Relations Bill was presented to Parliament but it had not been passed when the Labour Party lost the 1970 General Election.

The issue of the pre-strike ballot came to the fore in the 1984 miners' strike because the Executive of the National Union of Mineworkers refused to hold a national ballot, presumably because they were not sure that it would get the

55 per cent majority required by rule. The strike therefore came into conflict with the law but the National Coal Board decided not to take the issue to court. Instead, court action was taken by working members of the NUM who obtained an injunction preventing the NUM from claiming that the strike was an official one. The NUM was fined £200,000 for contempt of court. Through another action by the working members of the NUM, most of its funds were sequestrated and placed under the control of a receiver appointed by the court.

Union voting methods have recently featured in reported cases of "*ballot-rigging*". In 1985 the Transport and General Workers Union reluctantly decided to hold a new ballot for the appointment of their General Secretary. The media presented the issue of ballot-rigging in the TGWU in terms of a struggle between '*left*' and '*right*', and recalled the case of the Electrical Trade Union in 1961 when the High Court found that there had been massive vote-rigging, by members of the Communist Party, designed to keep a fellow Communist in office as General Secretary. The court held the defeated candidate to have been validly elected. At the time the Communist Party of Great Britain disclaimed responsibility for the action of their members in the ETU and proclaimed their adherence to democratic methods. The disclaimer had a hollow ring in view of Lenin's explicit guidance to his followers to get control of the unions by any and every means:

It is necessary ... if need be, to resort to strategy and adroitness, illegal proceedings, reticence and subterfuge, to anything in order to penetrate into the trade unions, remain there and carry on communist work within them at any cost.

Lenin, LEFT WING COMMUNISM, published by the CPGB, p 39

However the CPGB in a letter to THE TIMES (16 September 1976) did make one valid point about ballot-rigging: that members of the Labour Party and the Tory Party had, on occasion, been equally guilty. The ETU case led to that union adopting a new system for ballots to prevent abuse, the whole ballot being conducted by an independent body, the Electoral Reform Society.

It remains to consider what is the attitude of socialists on all these issues. Firstly, we favour democratic organisation and methods in unions and elsewhere; we do not aim, by vote-rigging or other trickery, to capture control of the unions and we are in favour of ballots to decide all issues.

But the socialist attitude goes far beyond this and is unique among political parties in this country. Socialists are not interested in choosing between 'good' and 'bad' leaders but in persuading the working class to abandon the whole concept of leadership. As we said in the SOCIALIST STANDARD of May 1912:

All their militant strength must be based upon the knowledge of their class position and the logical course dictated by that position. Therefore at the outset the need for leaders does not exist. Only those who do not know the way need to be led, and this very fact makes it inevitable that those who are led will be entirely in the hands of those who lead.

The article went on to argue that the leader depends on the lack of knowledge of those who are led and has an interest in maintaining that lack of knowledge, not in getting rid of it.

On the trade union field, the Socialist Party's attitude was highlighted by a libel action brought against Party members by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, because of a statement in the SOCIALIST STANDARD that the leaders had betrayed their members after the Executive of the union had agreed to a settlement against the vote of members employed on the North Eastern Railway. In spite of the fact that the Executive did not consult the whole of the membership, the judge held that the action of the Executive was covered by union rules and was justified by the organisation's responsibility to look after the interests of the membership. The judge awarded in favour of the union.

The socialist view has always been that the members of a union should at all times keep control of union policy and actions in their own hands, and not allow freedom of action to executive or officials. Not only should the decision to strike be by ballot of the members but also the decision to accept the terms of settlement of a strike. This acceptance of full responsibility by the members of unions involves the need for them to understand the workings of capitalism and the resulting 'economics' of strikes, and to take into account the fact that over-riding power rests with those who control the machinery of government, including the armed forces, and that state power is always available to back the employers in the defence of capitalism.

As it was put in an article in the SOCIALIST STANDARD (April 1919): "*On the economic field the masters are in a far stronger position than the workers and can beat them any time they decide to fight to a finish*". Whether the government and the employers will think it desirable to "*fight to the finish*" depends on a number of factors, including whether trade is good and profits steady or whether there is a depression. When trade is good, employers do not want the flow of profits to be interrupted by a strike. But when sales and profits are falling, the unions have little hope of putting pressure on employers by threatening to close factories which the employers are closing anyway, either temporarily or permanently.

This can be illustrated by comparing the successful coal strike of 1974 with the failure of the coal strike in 1984. In 1974 British capitalism was booming. Profits were high and rising; unemployment was at a very low level of 600,000, less than one fifth of what it was in 1984. Employers did not want their flow of profits to be stopped by the coal strike. So much so that a small group of wealthy capitalists met together secretly (it was reported in the press without disclosure of names) and offered a gift of £2,500,000 (equivalent to £18 million at current prices) to the NUM as an inducement to settle the strike. The offer was declined. The outcome of the situation as it existed in 1974 was that in a short strike of four weeks the NUM gained a substantial wage increase, whereas in the very different situation of 1984-5 the strike lasted almost a year and was a total failure.

It should be noted that what is "*short*" or "*long*" with strikes depends on the industry. A power-station strike or a telephone strike makes its impact instantly, but with a strike in industries where there are large stocks in the pipeline, as with steel and coal, it may take weeks before the union can see whether the cessation of production is likely to exert pressure on employers generally.

It only remains to add that, in the nature of capitalism, what trade unions and strikes can achieve is always limited. In particular, trade union action cannot lead to the emancipation of the working class and the establishment of socialism.

Lessons Of The General Strike

Throughout the strike the General Council [of the TUC] closed its eyes to the class conflict in which it was involved and insisted that the issue was purely an industrial one. Not so the Government. It realised clearly the class character of its own acts and called for support from the un-class conscious by addressing them as "the nation" and telling them that Parliament and the constitution were threatened

... The two outstanding lessons of the General Strike were, firstly, that while political power is in the hands of the capitalist class, and until such time as the workers take it into their own hands, they must expect defeat in industrial struggles that threaten the interests of the whole capitalist class. Secondly, the evils of leadership. To blame the General Council or call them cowards and traitors solves nothing. To replace them by other leaders is merely to invite continuous repetitions of similar debacles. To be free of cowards, traitors, hypocrites, fakirs, and even well intentioned mis-leaders, the workers must see to it that their representatives are their servants, not their masters, carrying out instructions, not giving them.

SOCIALIST STANDARD, September 1954

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Trade Unions and The SPGB

Background

The SPGB has only given support to Trade Unions when we consider their actions to be in line with the general interest of the working class. During the miners' strike of 1984 the Party was divided over the issue of support for a strike which had the unthinking backing of the capitalist left. A group within the Party wanted to support the miners' strike and tried to distort the Party's policy to this end. Camden Branch and North West London Branch repudiated this opportunist attempt to get the party to support a strike that was undemocratic, misguided, bound to fail, and not in the interests of the working class as a whole, being fought over the sectional interests of one group of workers at the expense of other workers.

In August 1984, Camden Branch circulated to Central Branch members a statement about the position of the Party in respect to the miners' strike. This circular is a record of what we said at the time and a confirmation that political principle, not opportunism, is the watchword of the Party.

The 1984 Miners' Strike The SPGB, the TRADE UNIONS and the MINERS' STRIKE

1. At its formation the Party thrashed out a considered statement on the trade unions which was endorsed by Conference and Party Poll, and was published in the 1905 Party Manifesto.

It stated that the basis of the trade unions must be a clear recognition of the position of the workers under capitalism and the class struggle necessarily arising therefrom, and that all action by the unions tending to sidetrack the workers from the only path that can lead to their emancipation should be strongly opposed. Only action on sound lines should be supported.

2. In conformity with the Party's opposition to leadership, workers in the unions were urged to keep control of union affairs in their own hands; including the need for a ballot to decide on strikes and a ballot to call strikes off. Apart from the democratic principle here involved, there is an elementary need for such ballots in order to ensure that the workers go out on strike together and go back together. The holding of a pre-strike ballot deprives an anti-strike minority of the excuse to go on working.

The holding of a ballot on ending the strike obviates the bitter internal dissension which accompanies a gradual, unorganised drift back to work and which in the miners' 6-month strike in 1926 crippled the Miners Federation for years through the formation of rival, breakaway, unions.

The Party has also consistently warned against the dangerous illusion that unions can defeat the state power of those in effective control of the machinery of government, including the armed forces, when those in control decide that victory on a particular issue is vital to their class interests.

3. The major issue in the present miners' strike is the effort of the National Union of Mineworkers to prevent the closure of uneconomic pits and thus to maintain the number of men working in the mines.

Being organised, like other unions, on the basis of serving the interests of its own members, this policy not only ignores the realities of capitalism, but takes no regard to the conflicting interests of other workers.

Directly, and through support of Labour Party policy, the N.U.M. has long been committed to stopping the import of coal. How does replacing foreign coal by coal produced by British miners preserve jobs for miners? It simply means more jobs for British miners and fewer jobs for miners in other countries.

Likewise the N.U.M's policy is to convert power stations from oil to coal and to expand the coal industry while cutting back on nuclear energy.

Other unions, on the same plea of saving the jobs of their members, have other claims. Unions in the electricity industry and the steel industry cross miners' picket lines on the excuse that they are saving the jobs of their members.

4. The N.U.M. claims that in fighting to preserve jobs for British miners it is serving the interest of the working class in respect of creating or preserving jobs for all workers. This means supporting the policy of the Labour Party. Mr Scargill has gone on record with the claim that the return of a Labour government would "*get rid of unemployment and create meaningful jobs*".

This betrays a total ignorance of the workings of capitalism. The varying number of jobs available to the working class, here and in the rest of the world, depends on variations from time to time in the market demand for commodities at profitable prices.

There is nothing such strikes can do to increase the number of jobs or rid capitalism of unemployment.

5. In accordance with the Party's commitment to bring the unions to a clear recognition of the position of the workers under capitalism, the Party has a continuous obligation to explain the facts of capitalism and the need for Socialism to miners and all other workers.

CAMDEN BRANCH STATEMENT
28 AUGUST 1984

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Abolishing Child Poverty:Charity or Socialism?

Abolish child suffering by becoming a Socialist!

A child who doesn't have enough food to eat, who has nothing other than dirty water to drink, who lacks healthcare and can only dream about having an education faces a future of extreme poverty where they will struggle to survive.

A child like this needs help. However help can only be provided if the correct social framework exists. And that is Socialism - common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

And Socialism requires socialists. Through becoming a socialist, which costs absolutely nothing, you can change the conditions of absolute and relative poverty we all live under today. Politicians cannot bring about this change. Neither can charities. Only the working class can solve their own problem by abolishing capitalism and establishing Socialism. Only Socialism can give them, and their community, the chance of a real future free from poverty.

Abolish child hunger by establishing Socialism!

Children living in poor communities often come from families that go to bed every night hungry - simply because they cannot grow enough food to feed themselves. Poor people often struggle to farm dry and infertile soil without adequate tools or fertilisers.

Through establishing Socialism, we can make sure that these children, their families and their whole community have enough to eat. Through the establishment of common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society, Socialism can enable communities to gain skills, tools and access to land which will mean that they can grow enough food for everyone.

Abolish child sickness by abolishing capitalism!

In the world's poorest communities, simple illnesses such as diarrhoea can kill. Without adequate healthcare, poor children continue to suffer and die for the want of medicines that cost just a few pounds.

The cause of this sickness is capitalism. Production is only undertaken for profit. Profit is all that the capitalists are interested in. In a rationally planned society of abundance, medicines would be available. Health care would be available. Capitalism is deliberate scarcity. Capitalism only knows or cares about paying customers.

Abolishing capitalism means that a socialist society can ensure production takes place simply to provide goods and services which are needed throughout the world. Socialist production will ensure that children and their communities have a safe, clean supply of water. And it also means that Socialism can enable them to gain access to the healthcare that could save their lives.

Abolish child illiteracy through free access!

Children who have been denied their education - either because they are forced into employment at an early age or because there is no education in their area - have little chance of escaping the poverty that they were born into so long as there is commodity production and exchange for profit.

Yet free access in a Socialist society will help a child have an education and learn the skill to develop their potential and flourish as human beings. Socialism would also be able to tackle adult illiteracy, particularly in the early years, because people would not be dependent upon employment. Work in Socialism would be voluntary. Socialism would enable the whole community to have access to the knowledge they need to take control of their lives.

If charity is not the answer, what is?

The failure of charity is its continued existence, holding out its begging bowl to workers who part with some of their wages in the hope - and it is a hope of almost theological proportions - that suffering and extreme poverty will be alleviated. It is a waste of money.

Charities cannot change lives. Charities cannot solve the problems of child poverty, ill health and illiteracy for one very simple reason. The capitalist class control the means of production. Production is for profit, not human need.

Charity is not the answer.

The answer is to become a socialist. Conscious political action towards a socialist object is where the working class should be heading, not the banality of Red Nose Day and its imitators. Each new socialist is a dent in the capitalist system. It is one more shovel of dirt emptied into capitalism's grave. The quicker that is filled, the quicker the pressing social problems of the world can be tackled and resolved.

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Chinese Capitalism

The first essential thing in writing a book about China's New Political Economy is an awareness of what economic terminology characterises capitalism and to have a clear understanding about the meaning of Socialism. This would enable writers to avoid the pitfall of misapplying the features of capitalism to Socialist society and to more clearly record their detailed information in a way that makes sense.

When Susuma Yabuki and Stephen M Harmer launched into their book, CHINA'S NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY, they had made no attempt to acquaint themselves with Marx's theory of primitive accumulation or his analysis of commodity production.

They remained seemingly unaware that the early 'five year plans', as with the Soviet Union, were China's crude beginning on the road to building a classically capitalist economy as described by Marx in VOLUME I of CAPITAL, a system where goods and services are produced for sale and profit.

On page 1, Yabuki and Harmer deal with the argument that the state system in China will collapse as it had done in the Soviet Union. They assert that:

It is true that Chinese Socialism is based on a nation-building model learned from the Soviet Union. However in the process of freeing citizens from Socialism and the planned economy ... it is wrong to conclude that the precedent of break-up in the former Soviet Union bears significant similarity to the situation in China.

This statement contains all the fallacies common to people who have no knowledge of Socialism. The ruling clique of post-1949 China may well have borrowed the ideological claptrap of Leninism and modelled their power structure

on the Soviet police-state dictatorship. But this has nothing at all to do with Socialism.

They make a case that China started its break with centralised capitalism in the 1970s, about 20 years before their Soviet role model. To them this means freeing China from the planned economy of Socialism. This only gets them into a deeper mess because, not only do they fail to identify the system now existing in China, they are reduced to using a contradiction in terms: "*market Socialism*".

Having condemned the planned economy, the next 69 pages consist of detailing elaborate plans for every area of China's capitalist economy. It is related that the ninth 5-Year Plan (1996-2000) set a goal to raise coal production. Large and medium-sized mines had operated at a loss until March 1997 under the State Council's former Ministry of Coal Industry. In the four years 1992-1996 the loss was reduced from Renminbi 5.75 billion to a mere Renminbi 400 million, and the writers comment: "*A return to profitable operation is expected for 1997*" (p68).

During the period 1996-2000 it was planned that coal production would increase at an annual rate of 2.3 per cent, reaching 1.45 billion tons, of which 50 million tons would be exported (p65).

In a section dealing with grain supply and populations, plans for both stretch as far ahead as 2030.

The book has intricate tables, charts and illustration on just about every second page. The text consists largely of explaining their implications. Thus the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences supplies information, which states that:

Table 6.3 presents a hopeful forecast by some Chinese economists up to the year 2050. By 2030 China becomes a 'middle-income country' (in some areas equivalent to a high-income country) and by 2050 it reaches 'the middle-ranks' of high-income countries; thus the forecast sees China materially realising the dream envisaged by Deng Xiaoping. The vision for the year 2050 comprises ten elements (p55).

There follows an itemised list of ten elements which include:

- Catching up with the United States in the information industry - Number 2;
- The structure of employment changes; competition for employment increases as the unemployment remains high - Number 6;
- Reform of State-owned enterprises has been completed; modernization of agriculture is a new agenda item - Number 7;
- By 2030 industrialization is completed and thereafter pressure on the natural environment lessens - Number 9.

"In summary, this is a vision of the post-industrial society. It is a dream of satisfying the desire to catch up with the world's advanced countries" (pp55-56).

It is quite clear that this whole "*dream*" agenda is one for a developing capitalist country. In terms of social evolution it is absurd to postulate Socialism preceding capitalism. Such an idea stands history on its head. Clearly the system of employment, classes and exploitation will be replaced by the higher stage of social evolution when classes are abolished and production is directly for use.

The changing structure of employment and competition for jobs against the threat of unemployment are conditions common to every capitalist country and are uniquely characteristic of that system. This is what Marx and Engels referred to as capitalism's "*industrial reserve army*".

None of the forecasted lines of development take into account anything happening in the rest of the capitalist world.

Catching up with the US information industry assumes that for 50 years America's information technology will stand still. Possible conflicts in a world of rivalry are not considered nor is changing technology in capitalism generally, although this is a major factor behind competition and conflict given the continuing class ownership of industry and resources.

No thought is given to any possible growth of working class consciousness in 30 or 50 years. It should not be taken for granted that workers will remain docile and content to remain employees competing for jobs.

In his AUTHORS'S PREFACE to the first edition of VOLUME I of CAPITAL, Marx makes the point that: "*The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.*"

Environmental Contamination

There would be a huge increase in energy consumption if per capita consumption for China's 1.2 bn people is ever raised to the level of advanced countries. This implies a potential challenge to the limits of world energy resources (p71).

We are told that in the advanced countries there is a deepening awareness of ecology and that governments are looking for a growth model to replace the "*big growth, big consumption and big population*" of the past.

The statement that there would be a huge increase in world energy consumption if Chinese per capita consumption was ever raised to that of advanced countries, not only makes nonsense of China ever having been in advance of capitalism, it also shows the disproportion and imbalance of commodity production.

The assertion that the advanced countries are aware of ecology and looking for a better growth model is the reverse of reality. The one success of the Kyoto Conference was in exposing American indifference.

In China the three major elements damaging the environment at varying levels are:

Sulphur dioxide, coal dust, and industrial waste water has increased and decreased during the 10-year period 1985-1995. During the mid-1980s the volume of sulphur dioxide emissions was in the range of 12-13 million tons. By 1995 it was approaching 20 million tons - an increase of 40 per cent. Coal dust increased about 10 per cent. Industrial waste water decreased somewhat more than 10 per cent (p73).

Assuming an average annual growth rate of 4 per cent in GNP, by 2010 it is forecast that sulphur dioxide emissions will have reached 37.24 million tons. China is already exceeding 4 per cent annual growth. Sulphur dioxide is the major cause of acid rain and air pollution. China relies upon coal for three-quarters of its primary energy. The high sulphur content from some regions "*... places an increasingly heavy burden on the global environment*".

By far the greatest lesson to be learned here is that there can be no national solution to the world problems produced by capitalism. Environmental damage does not respect frontiers. A world solution alone is applicable. The obsolescence of the national state where rival capitalists in isolation carry on, in anarchic folly, doing things which affect the world's population, demands to be dealt with.

The only way forward for humanity is to co-ordinate the democratic use of world resources for the common good. This means the end of competition for markets and of the profit motive. Decisions to use renewable energy resources cannot meaningfully be taken except on a world scale by a conscious populace, owning the means of production in common. Consumption, by and of itself, does not mean a better quality of life for the workers. It co-exists with congestion, increasing stress and job insecurity, with the trade-cycle of boom, glut and recession always to be reckoned with.

Regarding population, China has adopted a policy of restriction based on coercion from the top, showing again the hierarchic nature of Chinese capitalism. A general free-for-all prevails worldwide in which there is no enlightened involvement of ordinary people in decision-making.

What these figures really show is that Chinese state enterprises are subject to the same standard, the expectation of profit, and are measured in exactly the same monetary terms, as private capitalism. Even the term enterprise, meaning business undertaking, is applied both to state and private capitalism.

With all the book's graphs and figures, what in fact is being charted is the steady progression of China as a fully-fledged capitalist country. That China covers a vast area of over 9.5m sq km and has a population of 1,275 million (Dec. 2000), living in provinces which are in effect federated countries, does not deny the capitalist nature of its entire landmass despite widely differing levels of development and income.

It is only necessary to read the figures at the back of the book which, from 1979 to 1995, detail the many hundreds of billions of yen that Japan has loaned to China, to see the gradual emergence of another major capitalist power grooming itself for an onslaught into the competitive jungle of the world market.

To prefix the names of the institutions of capitalism with the word "*Peoples*", as in Peoples State, Peoples Bank, Peoples Press and so on, proves nothing. The people who occupy the commanding positions in the social relations of production under which these institutions operate are the capitalist class or their political agents. It is the purpose of Socialism to abolish this system.

Theory and Reality

In an appendix which lists years during which particular events took place, in the year 1987 we are told: "*The Thirteenth Party Congress adopts the Theory of the Initial Stage of Socialism*". Since the whole purpose of the book is to trace and detail the break with '*Socialism*' and the spread of '*liberalization*' (a pseudonym for the market economy), it might be of some interest if the authors could tell us when Socialism is supposed to have existed in China. It should be noted, of course, that to adopt the '*theory*' is very different from installing the reality. Also, details of the contents of this '*theory of the initial stage*' would be revealing.

Among the events recorded for 1989 are:-

- Peoples Daily carries the article -
- Our Country Has Already Become a Net Aid Receiving Country.
- Martial law is declared in some sections of Beijing municipality.
- Suppression by military force is begun against the democracy movement - June 3-4 (p286).

In August 1991, "*In the former Soviet Union an attempted coup d'etat by the old conservative faction fails; the Soviet Communist Party is disbanded*." This last incident must have sent a cold shudder down the backs of China's ruling elite.

The reference to '*conservative faction*' is proof that even within one-party dictatorships dissent finds expression inside the party. Factions also exist inside the multi-party versions of capitalism. The power struggles are much the same.

The wording of a document issued in May 1992 has a special significance: "*Views of the Communist Party Central Committee on Expanding Reform and Liberalization to take the economy to a Higher and more Splendid Stage*." Reform and liberalisation are standard forms of double-talk which simply mean changing from nationalisation to private enterprise and the loosening of central state bureaucracy in favour of open competition. The market system works better for some capitalists if the weak go to the wall without state protection. What is significant is that China managed to engineer the move to liberalised private capitalism without the so-called Communist Party losing power as it had done in Russia.

To clinch our case that the theory is made to fit the facts by double-talk, the last entry for 1992 reads: "*Convening of the Chinese Communist Party's Fourteenth Party Congress. The theory of 'the Socialist market economy' is embraced*." In November 1993 the CP Central Committee plenum adopted "*Fifty Articles for a Market Economy*". After giving a figure for official foreign exchange reserves of US \$140 billion at the end of 1997 we are told: "*It is estimated that an amount of foreign exchange equivalent to official reserves is in the hands of private Chinese individuals and deposited in Chinese banks*" (p246).

Capitalism Continues

All the evidence shows there has been a continuity in China from the early years of '*Communist*' party power to the present time. It has been the continuity of capitalism from its crude beginning with a peasant agrarian background

through successive stages of industrial capital accumulation and the growth of commodity production, to becoming a major player in the market world of competition and militarism.

This capitalist continuity can be demonstrated by reference to a pamphlet published in 1969 by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking. Under the title, CHINA'S RMB, ONE OF THE FEW MOST STABLE CURRENCIES IN THE WORLD, this pamphlet lauds the THOUGHTS OF MAO TSETUNG and elevates him to a super-human level, in much the same way as Lenin and Stalin were elevated in Russia.

In a chapter headed A COUNTRY WITHOUT DEBTS, details are given about six national bonds issued from 1950 to 1958 to *"raise capital funds"*. These totalled nearly 4 billion RMB, plus interest of nearly a further billion. The boast is made that the total debt was paid by the end of 1968. During this period *"... the Soviet Union, which was then led by Stalin, extended some loans to China, the principal and interest of which totalled 1,406 million new roubles"*. These debts were redeemed ahead of time in 1965 (p6).

Then there was a falling out between these two countries both falsely claiming to be Socialist. *"China was hit by natural calamities for three successive years from 1959 to 1961 and the perfidious Soviet revisionist renegade clique suddenly stopped its economic and technical assistance to China and withdrew the Soviet experts causing great losses to China's economy"* (p10).

A few lines illustrate more vividly than anything how the norms of capitalism are accepted in China: *"China successfully exploded its first atom bomb in 1964 and set off a new hydrogen bomb in 1968. On the basis of increased production, the material and cultural life of the Chinese people has improved enormously; markets are thriving and prices are stable"* (p7).

Now, if we return to Yabuki and Harmer's book and focus on p278, we find that in the years 1979 to 1998 China engaged in four loan programmes with Japan, borrowing a total of more than 2 trillion yen. *"In each case terms are thirty years for repayment."* The four huge loans were to finance the building and development of infrastructure projects including railways, ports, electric power, telecommunications, aviation and urban transportation.

So, more than 50 years after the national bond issues and its loans from Soviet Russia, despite its boast of being *"debt free"*, China is still heavily in debt and will be until about 2028, unless a weakened yen due to the slump in Japan helps to speed up repayment. Thus China is still raising capital funds.

To append the name of Socialism to these procedures is ridiculous. It should not be forgotten that the repayment of capital loans and interest comes out of the hides of workers from the surplus value they produce in excess of their wages.

All the modifications to China's industrial, commercial, banking and trading laws were made with one aim in view: membership of the World Trade Organisation. The Fifty Articles adopted in 1993 by the Chinese '*Communist*' Party were clearly aimed at gaining an open market economy. Liberalisation meant that joint stock companies would create a legal corporate person *"... effectively separating the ownership rights of the investors from the property rights of the corporation as well as the government from the enterprise"*(p41). In October 1996 China declared it would henceforth not *"... implement any policies or laws not in conformity with WTO principles"*. In December it complied in advance with IMF article 8 regarding convertibility of the RMB for settlement of trade and service transactions (p237).

At the time of the publication of Yabuki and Harmer's book (1999) China had still not succeeded in joining the WTO. This did not happen until November 2001, after 15 years of negotiations. Commenting on the event, Dr Hussain of the London School of Economics said:

China is already the seventh largest exporter in the world ... VW are the largest car producers in China ... China is the second largest recipient of foreign investment after the USA so it's already a major player (TELETEXT, 11 December 2001).

It was also noted that China has the potential to become a superpower to rival the US. That the American ruling clique had long feared Chinese economic and military expansion is shown by US policy over many years. A 21-year

trade embargo was lifted in June 1971 and 30 years later China has been admitted to the WTO.

Past and Present

After June 1989 when the Chinese government used tanks to crush a students' rebellion in Tiananmen Square killing hundreds (at the lowest estimate), the US propagandists played the human-rights card as often as possible.

Of the numerous examples of contempt for so-called human rights and of indifference to human misery and suffering on the part of American capitalism, none surpasses that contained in a CHANNEL 4 NEWS report (3 March 2003). In 1942 Japan used anthrax against China.

From Shanghai along the rail line to Tangjia in the Zhejiang Province, an area the size of Britain, 60 years later people who were then children still suffer disfigurement. Flesh turned black and fell away. In one area, 50,000 people died and 300,000 became ill from mysterious diseases. Typhoid and cholera were also used.

CHANNEL 4 used the report of Amelia Hill of THE OBSERVER who stated that:

In a post-war pact, the Japanese handed the allies their knowledge of biological warfare. It was a deal which allowed Japan to deny its past [and gave] immunity from prosecution.

The allies, America, Britain and Russia, thereby traded the lives and extreme suffering of hundreds of thousands of Chinese people (also allies) to gain Japanese knowledge of biological weapons and let the Japanese state keep quiet about it.

If China is a 'major player' today it is not just in terms of its WTO membership, or its exports which, in 1995, already accounted for 3 per cent of the world's total, or its imports at 2.6 per cent of the total. China's vast potential for industrial expansion is to be seen in association with its possession of nuclear weapons and the ability to deliver them.

The American-imposed trade embargo dates back to the time of the Korean War, when China supported the North against America in the South. There was a time when it was touch-and-go as to whether the US forces would cross the Yalu River and extend the war into China. President Truman made it clear that "*nuclear weapons would only be used if Moscow or Peking widened the war*" (PENGUIN HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, pp 488-489).

Capitalism continues to create threatening situations around the world. Today China plays host to diplomats from the US, Russia and Japan to discuss North Korea's nuclear weapons policy. The Korean War, 50 years ago, solved nothing.

How New Labour Champions Workers' Rights

The EU's proposed new Charter of Fundamental Rights includes certain clauses which may give some legal rights to workers with regard to industrial issues. The Charter proposes to guarantee the right to strike, also protection from unfair dismissal and discrimination.

In Europe, maybe - but not in Blair's business-friendly Britain.

In a TV interview, Denis MacShane - the arch-Blairite Minister for Europe - declared that he was "*very happy to hear that this Charter will NOT have any effect in British law ... I welcome the [German Minister's] statement that the Charter of Fundamental Rights has no impact on British domestic law*"(BBC NEWSNIGHT, 18 May 2004). And to make quite sure that we all got the message, he repeated this emphatically. Now there's a man who knows which side his bread's buttered on.

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America's Presidential Farce

The American presidential election is inextricably bound up with violence, war, bombing, torture and murder, in a word, state-terrorism. The lying pretext for bombing and invading Iraq - to liberate the Iraqi people from a brutal dictatorship - is exposed by the use of Abu Ghraib prison by the Americans, to inflict torture, sexual humiliation and murder on dissidents, in the same way and in the same place that was used by Saddam Hussein.

Undoubtedly, the major reason for the massive hyping-up of the D-day 'celebrations' was to take the heat off Iraq, by filling the media with a deluge of other 'heroic attractions'. In the days when America was atom-bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki, President Truman said: "*the buck stops here*". Today, although G W Bush as head-of-state is Commander-in-Chief of all US armed forces, the "*buck*" stopped with a few lower-ranking army commanders. Rumsfeld, Defence Secretary, took "*responsibility*" without taking the consequences.

Bush went to Rome on 4 June, ostensibly to commemorate the liberation by American forces 60 years earlier. This fell in nicely with the saturation coverage of the Normandy landings of 1944 and was a photo-opportunity not to be missed. He visited the Pope in a delicately handled piece of diplomacy which even TV news readers saw could play well to gain Catholic votes in America.

It was also noted that his Democrat challenger for the White House, John Kerry, is a Catholic who, like Bush, supported the war against Iraq, which the Pope opposed. The fact that opportunism was the name of the game could be seen from Bush and his crew seeking to draw parallels between World War II and his orgy of death and destruction in Iraq.

The saddest parallel of all is that, 60 years ago, workers were prepared to wave their masters' flags in support of capitalism and to fight its wars, and in 2004, failing to see that war has not made the world "*safe for peace and democracy*", are still waving flags and fighting wars.

Bush also sought to play on General Eisenhower's example of a man who became President after being a war leader. The continuity of American militarism and reverence for armed force has been a major factor in moulding American nationalism, which has vastly intensified since the end of WWII. Each generation of young men and, increasingly, women has found uniforms and military hardware waiting for them. Every postwar US President has built up or maintained America's nuclear arsenal - including Kennedy who gave the world the Cuban missile crisis.

The defeat of Hitlerism in Europe has failed to make the world peaceful. There has been an endless series of wars in every area of the world. America, Britain and France have either been involved in, or supplied the arms, for most of them. All three were involved in Vietnam and share responsibility for the 3 million killed. The leaders of these countries have the brazen hypocrisy to rant about "*our civilisation*". In the June ceremonies and speeches about D-Day, nobody - Bush, Blair, Berlusconi and, least of all, veterans wearing their masters' medals - nobody asked where Hitlerism came from. It came out of the conditions left by World War One, when defeated German capitalism was seeking its place in the sun. Hitler was the man of whom Winston Churchill wrote in 1935: "*If our country were defeated I hope we should find a champion as admirable to restore our courage and lead us back to our place among the nations*".

Emrys Hughes, WINSTON CHURCHILL IN WAR AND PEACE, 1949, p139

Quite early in the Presidential campaign, John Kerry was making capital out of his active military record compared to that of Bush. He said of the Bush offensive: "*It's oil - we will change the policy motivated by oil*" (BBC1, 7 April 2004). America's dependency on imported oil would be the same under Kerry. He is not an alternative to Bush - he is simply an alternative Bush, just as Bush was an alternative Clinton. Kerry summed himself up when he said: "*America should not go to war because it wants to but because it has to*" (CHANNEL FOUR, 20 June 2004). A meaningless distinction: when capitalism produces a war situation, the two become the same.

The close unity between both Republican and Democrat parties and military force, and the support for this by a brain-washed populace, can be seen in the continuity of policy between the Truman (Democrat) and the Eisenhower (Republican) administrations. The election of a war-time General as President betrayed the intensity of patriotism.

Eisenhower installed John Foster Dulles as his Secretary of State, the post held by ex-General Colin Powell today. Dulles was a rabid anti-Russian, and it was under this administration that the hydrogen bomb was first produced. Their military strategy was a nuclear one and in early 1955, when 'communist' China bombarded the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, *"the USA called in its Pacific fleet and even threatened the use of nuclear weapons against the mainland"* (LONGMAN GCSE WORLD HISTORY, 1994 edition, p172).

Despite the ominous proliferation of nuclear weapons, America remains the only country to have dropped atomic bombs on human targets. As recently as the launch of the so-called 'war against terrorism', the Bush administration decided to keep the nuclear option open. It was George W Bush who unilaterally tore up the Test Ban Treaty.

In the summer of 1963, the former President Truman gave an interview to Daniel Snowman. This was published in THE TIMES (31 July 1995) under the heading: *"I never lost a wink of sleep over Hiroshima."* In the course of this interview, Truman said: *"I've never lost any sleep over any decision I've had to make."* As Daniel Snowman noted, *"that clearly included the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki"*.

Fifty years later, THE TIMES carried another article which said: *"Yet by April 1945, when Harry Truman succeeded to the Presidency, the Japanese were on their knees"* (5 August 1995). This TIMES article gave details of the terrible intensity of 'conventional' bombing of mainland Japan: one particular raid on 8 March 1945 used napalm *"... creating a firestorm as evil as anything experienced in Hamburg or Dresden, and leaving 83,000 dead in a single night"*. The city on the receiving end of this insanity was Tokyo.

Truman's modern-day successors - Clinton, Bush, Rumsfeld, Powell, Blair, Hoon and Straw - are also unlikely to have lost any sleep over their massive bombing of Serbia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Just as prevailing myth has it that atom-bombing Japan actually saved lives, so Bush and Blair promote their own myths about making the world safe by bombing.

Sovereignty is always the concern of the ruling class. The working class have no country and no sovereignty. A class that sells itself piecemeal on the labour market for wages is not even in sovereign control of its being as people.

On June 28 2004, CHANNEL FOUR NEWS did an extended news programme dealing in detail with the Iraq war and its aftermath. Paul Bremer, who had been America's boss-man, conducted a brief ceremony of hand-over to an unelected provisional government, a mere symbolic ending of occupation, leaving Iraq in the grip of violence and facing many years of the presence of foreign forces: 140,000 US troops, plus 200,000 other coalition forces. Bremer imposed US edicts restricting the interim government, and installed 26 US-appointed inspectors in each ministry, including oil and security.

Giving figures for the numbers of people killed, the programme interviewed people in Iraq with access to information. It was estimated that 20,000 Iraqi soldiers died; 850 US troops were killed, mostly after Bush declared the war over; at least 11,000 Iraqi civilians, including 750 women and 840 children; and each month 1,000 US wounded soldiers go to Germany for hospital treatment. The US Department of Defence and the UK's Ministry of Defence are not being very forthcoming with figures. One US soldier in seven returns home with mental disorders, 24 committed suicide in Iraq and 7 others did so after returning home.

The American people are prevented from seeing the coffins of US military dead as the media are tightly controlled. However, when the SEATTLE TIMES published a picture of coffins draped in the flag, this was syndicated and reproduced around the world. The photographer, a private individual, was sacked. So much for America's so-called freedom and democracy!

In Baghdad, the hospitals are crammed with bystander victims of bomb attacks and other violence. 100 security personnel in Iraq have been killed in a year. Almost all the larger western charities have fled. Only 10% of Iraqi houses have drinking water, and the electricity supply is not up and running. Dozens of companies, mostly American, are benefitting from reconstruction, with a budget of \$56 billion. Jon Snow, who did the commentary, said of Iraq that it is *"the most dangerous country in the world from which to report"*. With terror incidents increasing also in Saudi Arabia, this is what Bush calls *"liberation"*.

American capitalism now straddles the globe in much the same way as British capitalism did a century and more

ago. The role of world-policeman (unelected) was first proclaimed by Theodore Roosevelt in 1904, four years after America overtook Britain as the world's leading commercial trading country. The continuing struggle for world markets and for dominance of natural resources, such as oil and gas, must today be seen against the background of vastly more sophisticated scientific militarism. The fact that this ruthless quest for dominance and profits is shrouded in the garb of a phoney ideology is nothing new. Bombing people into '*democracy*' and then torturing them in the name of liberation and freedom serves only to expose the hypocrisy hiding the real motives of a predatory class.

Bush prattles on endlessly about the "*axis of evil*" in the eloquent way for which he is notorious, just as Reagan had focussed hatred on the "*evil empire*". In their self-righteous propaganda, they never see the misery and suffering they have inflicted. The war against Iraq was embarked on upon the lying pretext that WMD (weapons of mass destruction) could be used against the US or the UK "*in 45 minutes*". This was changed to become a war for regime change, to get rid of a monstrous tyrant whom America and its allies had armed and supported for at least eight years in his war against Iran.

Bush at first poured scorn upon the United Nations and "*old Europe*" in the expectation that with "*overwhelming force*", Iraq would be a push-over and the pickings would be theirs. After more than a year, with Bush forced to involve forces from many other nations, he had to crawl back into favour with the UN and Europe.

Socialists' opposition to war remains the same whether it has the UN's blessing or not, but then ours is a principled position, one which is not driven by oil but by working class interest.

The concentration camp in Guantanamo Bay gives the lie to any concern about democracy or the much vaunted rule of law. The Bush administration invented special categories for more than 600 prisoners held for over two years, without charge or trial, or even access to legal advice. They were not prisoners of war but "*armed combatants*", not subject to national or international law and without rights of any kind.

Bush had worked on the basis that the war in Iraq was over, but the war against unspecified terrorism is ongoing so he could do as he pleased. It took a ruling from the US Supreme Court at the end of June 2004 to challenge the President's right to do as he wants, and to declare that the prisoners should be held in America and have access to legal advice. Fortuitously perhaps, Bush's law was condemned by the Supreme Court just at the moment when the news was dominated by the power 'hand-over' in Iraq.

American Presidential elections do not present the American working class with a choice between capitalism and Socialism but merely a choice between two individuals, both committed to continuing capitalism. Socialist understanding has to make its own way against the poisonous indoctrination of patriotic nationalism but the insane consequences of capitalism must finally work against it.

And They Call It "Democracy"

One of Paul Bremer's last acts was to re-introduce Saddam's 1984 law banning all strikes in Iraq. He did so in order that workers in Iraq would not jeopardise the lucrative contracts of the mostly US companies now working there. Bremer wanted to muzzle the Federation of Iraqi Trade Unions in order, in the words of Robert Fisk (The Independent, 4 July 2004), "*to protect big business*". So much for the rhetoric of "*democracy*".

Blair prattles on about "*democracy*" in Iraq. Where is his criticism of the law banning strikes in Iraq? Silence. The war in Iraq was all about oil. Democracy only begins with the establishment of socialism.

Profit From Terrorism

When foreign mercenaries were butchered by a mob in the Iraqi town of Fallujah, the media highlighted the rich pickings being made in Iraq by private security companies like Blackwater Security Consulting, based in North Carolina. Blackwater has been awarded more than \$57 million in Pentagon contracts since 2002. Setting up your own private army is very profitable. More than \$20 billion - a third of the US Army operating budget in Iraq and Afghanistan - is paid to contractors (THE TIMES, 2 April 2002).

So there is profit in terrorism, although the charred remains of the bodies hanging unceremoniously from a bridge are

a potent symbol that such profits come at a price. But it will not be the owners of the private security companies in Iraq who will have to pay it. The price, as usual, is borne by the working class.

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War, Principle and Socialism

The SPGB has always taken a particular stand on war. The Party has opposed war on the grounds of class interest and class internationalism. The working class do not own raw resources, they do not have trade routes to defend and they do not have spheres of influence to maintain. The working class have nothing but their labour power to sell.

When the capitalist state forced conscription onto the working class, Socialists refused to be conscripted. Wars are fought over capitalist interests or are caused by capitalism's competing interests. To abolish wars requires the conscious and political action of a working class majority. A socialist has a principled duty to oppose war and have no part in its execution. In both World Wars, this meant a collision with the capitalist state. In the Second World War, as in the First, members of The SPGB were threatened with imprisonment and many went on the run to escape conscription.

We have in the Party archives the application by one of the Party members, Harry Young, to be registered as a conscientious objector. His application is dated 16 June 1941 when he was forty years of age. Below is his statement, argued as a Socialist and a member of The SPGB:

I object to National Service on Socialist grounds. In my view War, like other modern social evils (unemployment, poverty, a great deal of disease -etc), is the outcome of the Capitalist system of society. So long as the social institution of Private Property exists wars will be fought. Victories or defeats, therefore, make little fundamental difference to the position of the mass of the people. It is utterly impossible for me to reconcile these views with any form of support for war. The only course I can reasonably adopt is to keep plodding steadfastly on; endeavouring to explain to my fellow-man that - until such time as a majority of people (i.e. the working class) understand, and therefore, want socialism, no amount of bloodshed, slaughter or mutual destruction can alter their hard lot, in peace as in war. More, it cannot even achieve Democracy, rather the contrary, as the previous war proved (1914-18), it produces bloody, brutal dictatorships. When the people understand this, then a peaceful transformation from Capitalism to Socialism is not only possible - it is highly probable. My whole life, since leaving the elementary school, has been closely connected with the Labour Movement, beginning with the "Herald League" formed by the late Mr George Lansbury M.P. which I joined in 1918. In 1920, I joined the Communist Party, when it was formed, and became one of its officials, spending some years in Moscow. Subsequently, it became apparent to me that the so-called "collective security" policy of the Communist Party was simply a war policy in the interests of the Soviet Government. The party which opened my eyes to this was the one which I have since joined: The SPGB.

To me, therefore, to take part in supporting the war would be a complete denial and repudiation of everything I have tried to do for the past twenty years. It would certainly be contrary to everything I have preached on the public platform, involving the most contemptible and nauseating hypocrisy. I recognise that my opinions may be very unpopular, but at least they are sincere, and merit recognition as such. I therefore ask the same privilege as I readily accord to others, the right to state my case and viewpoint. Any form of National Service would be tantamount to renunciation of my standpoint, and with all due regard to the views of others, this I cannot do. I am naturally aware that loyalty to convictions frequently entails material sacrifice, thus in 1930 I was practically hounded out of the postal service on account of unorthodox opinions (I append the relevant papers). Only too well do I know how difficult it is for one of my views to obtain employment in peace time. Therefore I am compelled to state a categorical objection to National Service. (sgd) H. E. E Young P.S. I enclose references of personal character covering last ten years, including one from Mr John Jagger M.P.

The late Comrade Young won his case against conscription. When he was accused of "*cowardice*", he told his detractors that he drove a fire engine through streets engulfed in fire and raining with bombs.

The late Comrade Young was one of the group of Socialists who were expelled from the Clapham-based Socialist

Party on a trumped-up charge, for continuing to use the full name of the party in the class struggle, and who in June 1991 went on to reconstitute The SPGB.

Lessons Of The Russian Revolution

Without reservation, the Socialist Party refuted the claim that the Bolsheviks could introduce Socialism in Russia. We were critical of their aims and methods. Socialism was impossible before large scale, industrial production had developed, and with it also, a dispossessed working class population had been formed and won over to Socialism ...

... If there are lessons to be learned from Russia and other parts of the world where capitalism is administered in the name of Socialism and by men who sprang from the workers it is that the only way to Socialism is through working class understanding and democracy.

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Founding Statement, May 1904

FROM The SPGB'S ARCHIVES

EXTRACTS FROM CIRCULAR

To the Members of the S.D.F Dated May 23, 1904.

Comrades,
For years those who hold the views given in our previous manifesto have been working inside the Movement with a view to bringing the various facts before the members of the rank and file, and up to the issue of that circular were hoping that even yet it would be possible to remodel the S.D.F. and bring its policy in line with its principles. Against this, however, was the fact that the Executive Council, largely influenced by H. Quelch, who, as we have shown in our previous circular, is dominated by the Trade Union leaders and others who have a financial grip upon the Twentieth Century Press, *opposed in every way free and open discussion of our position*. All criticisms of the policy or the actions of the Executive Council were turned into questions of personal abuse in order to hide the real issue.

Now, Comrades, in building up a strong Socialist Party it is indispensable that the fullest discussion on all matters affecting the position of the Organisation should be allowed, and it is also obvious that the members of a Militant Revolutionary Party cannot consent in any way to have their opinions stifled by the actions of their E.C. But it is now evident that all further education of the members, either in relation to the facts of the situation, or in the essential principles upon which the Federation is based, is impossible within that body.

Realising this, the signatories to the aforementioned circular met together with others at Sidney Hall, Battersea, on Sunday, May 15, 1904, to consider the whole position, and carried with enthusiasm the following resolution:-

That this meeting has arrived at the conclusion that the only way to put the principles and policy embodied in the circular into operation is to leave the S.D.F. in a body and send a manifesto round the branches explaining our position and calling upon all those who are in favour of the same to join us in forming a straight, uncompromising Socialist Party.

In pursuance of this resolution, we appeal to all members who believe that the economic forces working through the development of capitalist society demand the formation of a Revolutionary Socialist Party; who believe that the emancipation of the working-class can only be obtained by the combined action of the members of that class, consciously organised in a Socialist Party, and who recognise that the Class-Struggle can alone be the basis of such a party; that therefore Social Democrats must avow themselves in opposition to all non-Socialist parties and politicians; and who realise that the S.D.F. has ceased to merit the name of such a party, to throw in your lot with us and to help us in building up a strong and healthy fighting party, organised on definite class lines for the emancipation of the working class from the wage-slavery under which they exist - from the capitalist society of

which they are the victims.

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Appeals for Socialist Unity, 1904 and 2004

They say that "*what goes round, comes round*", that history has a trick of repeating itself. That has certainly been the experience of The SPGB. In its early days, the Party was faced with the Second International's demand that, in any country where there was more than one 'Socialist' party, these organisations must try to unite. In our last issue (no.52), we described how this policy had worked out in the United States where De Leon's Socialist Labor Party made several abortive attempts to unite with the, reformist, Socialist Party of America.

In 1904 The SPGB was confronted with similar pressures to unite with the Social Democratic Federation, an organisation which had shown itself to be opportunist, reformist and undemocratic. The SDF leadership had deliberately and unscrupulously chosen to expel those who went on to found the new, Socialist, Party - a Party which declared from the start that it was going to be uncompromising in its work for Socialism and only for Socialism, and which decided as a matter of principle that the Socialist Party was to be "*independent of and opposed to all other political parties*".

Within a few months, The SPGB had declared its position on the question of '*Socialist Unity*' (SOCIALIST STANDARD, December 1904 - see excerpts in our CENTENARY BULLETIN):

We are all for unity. We believe that unity of party organisation based upon unity of purpose, unity of principle, and unity of method is the one thing desirable ...[But] in the field of Socialist thought and Socialist action there are today two distinct tendencies to be found: the revolutionary and the revisionist ... today the Socialist movement has been overtaken by a wave of revisionism...

... Unity is an important factor in the growth of a party, but it is not the most important. Better far to have a party, however small, with common principles and a common end, than a party, however large, which is bound by no tie save party interest. We, therefore, who differ from these other parties in essential principles - inasmuch as we accept the principle of the class struggle while they do not - cannot consent to unite our forces with theirs.

Move forward in time, to the present day, and we find ourselves again being urged to join forces and unite with others who claim to be 'Socialists'. Such calls come mainly from members of the (Clapham-based) Socialist Party, usually writing "*in a personal capacity*". One such appeal was the letter we recently published from C Skelly (see The SPGB, no 51), a member of that Party. His was not the only such approach that has been made to us by people who clearly seem to be unable to tell Stork from butter, to distinguish between a utopian, confused, "*all things to all men*", opportunistic outfit, and The SPGB which bases its case and its policy on The SPGB's DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES.

As stated in December 1904, the only sort of unity worth seeking is that where we would be certain of "*unity of purpose, unity of principle, and unity of method*". Today there are many organisations claiming to be Socialist. For most of them the term 'Socialism' is an empty concept, often left undefined, but variously suggesting these days nationalised public services, or a state-run welfare system and a policy of being kind to the poor.

As for the Clapham-based Socialist Party, the fact is that from the time in 1984 when they adopted a Conference resolution of an anarchist nature - declaring that Socialism entailed "*the immediate abolition of the state*" - they had thrown overboard one of The SPGB's key principles, one dealing with the question of method:

That as the machinery of government including the armed forces of the nation exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government .. in order that this machinery including these forces may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation ...

Not only did they abandon this principle but their members seem to see no conflict of principle when they take part

in 'anti-capitalism' protests and anti-war demonstrations, or support democratic reform movements. The SPGB however as a revolutionary party has only one aim - the establishment of Socialism. It is not the business of Socialists to try to improve or reform capitalism - there are plenty of other organisations who see this as their mission in life. All our efforts are focussed on working to build a strong, united, democratic, political movement for the overthrow of capitalism.

Those like Mr Skelly, who urge us to unite with their Party, would have us unite with a Party which itself lacks unity. It has among its members some who reject the class struggle principle, and especially the clauses in The SPGB's PRINCIPLES which commit us to political action and to being a Party "*independent of and opposed to all other political parties ...*". Among their members are those who urged support for the reformist and nationalist Polish movement, Solidarnosc. Among their members are those who want their Party to ally itself with other organisations that claim to be Socialist, regardless of whether these would accept the principle of political action to achieve Socialism.

They have had among their members and activists some who are anarcho-communists or 'libertarian' socialists. Others there were those who advocated council communism or industrial unionism as a means of achieving Socialism. There were those too whose big idea was (and probably still is) to build 'socialistic' organisations such as cooperatives, as a means of gradually ousting capitalism: a sort of latter-day Bernstein argument, that capitalism can be got to 'evolve', step by step, painlessly, into Socialism.

Among their members too are to be found some who argue that Socialism will still require police, law-courts and jails, even though they are committed as a Party to the anarchist formula of "*the immediate abolition of the state*".

While The SPGB has consistently exposed the social harm done by religion as a means of dividing the working class, of inculcating submissive docility and obedience to the 'powers that be', some of the Clapham Party's Companion Parties have decided, astonishingly, that religious or spiritual belief is a private matter and not a bar to membership.

Among their members, we even had contact with one who was intent on persuading us, and his fellow workers, to support the Bush-Blair war against Iraq!

What sort of 'unity' should we or could we have with a party so far gone down the slippery slope of utopianism as this one? A party so confused and disunited in itself? Clearly, no agreement with that party would be acceptable to all of its membership, even if we sought such an agreement.

There is a gulf that separates us from this confused, idealistic, utopian outfit. That is a party adrift, tossed hither and thither like so much flotsam and jetsam on the changing currents of history. It is a party that has lost its sense of direction since it has abandoned the principles of Socialism. Any party that does as it has done has, as it were, dug a deep hole and buried its past record. In so doing, it has lost its identity, its sense of direction and purpose.

That is not a party which can honestly declare, in the words of The SPGB's 1905 MANIFESTO, that: "*The only true position for a genuine working-class party is that of open hostility to all who support capitalism in any shape or form.*" To unite with such a party would be a step backward and a betrayal, not just of The SPGB, but of the working class.

The Parties of the Second International in 1904

To the uncritical it looked as if Socialism was "just round the corner". What they overlooked was the weakness of the parties that claimed to be Marxian and the futility of those that did not. All of them were tied to reform programmes that ultimately put out the fire of revolution they had lighted; all of them were dominated by the fatal principle of leadership and all of them collapsed under the blow of the first Great War.

SOCIALIST STANDARD
editorial - September 1954

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Our Contributions To The Socialist Movement

Background note:

In September 1904, the first issue of the official journal of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, the SOCIALIST STANDARD, was published and in September 1954, fifty years later, a special commemorative issue was published. We print below this short article from that issue summarising some of the Party's contributions to the movement for Socialism since we maintain that our Party has a unique record, one to be proud of, both regarding policy and organisation.

1. We have always insisted upon the capture of political power before any fundamental change in the social system can be accomplished.
2. Until the majority understood and want this change Socialism cannot be achieved.
3. Opposition to all reform policies and unswerving pursuit of Socialism as the sole objective.
4. Opposition to all war without any distinction between alleged wars of offence, of defence, or against tyranny.
5. The understanding that taxation is a burden upon the capitalist class and not upon the working class, and therefore any schemes which are brought forward to cut down taxes are measures of interest to the capitalist class and not to the working class.
6. That when the workers understand their position and how to change it they will not require leaders to guide them. Leadership is the bane of the working class movement for Socialism.
7. That Socialism is international involving the participation of workers all over the world. Therefore any suggestion of establishing Socialism in one country alone is anti-socialist.
8. In a given country there can only be one Socialist Party, therefore no member can belong to any other political party at the same time as he is a member of the Party.
9. Likewise no member can speak on any other political platform except in opposition.
10. The Socialist Party must be entirely independent of all other political parties entering into no agreement or alliances for any purpose. Compromising this independence for any purpose, however seemingly innocent, will lead to non-socialists giving support to the Party.
11. We throw our platform open to any opponent to state his case in opposition to ours.
12. Likewise all our Executive meetings, Branch meetings and Conferences are open to the public.
13. The members have entire control of the Party and all members are on an equal footing.
14. Finally the Party has a scrupulous regard for political honesty and no skeletons are permitted to moulder in cupboards.

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Capitalism Causes Poverty

Recent figures from the World Health Organisation (June 2000) show that 1.2 billion people, a fifth of the world's population, are living in abject poverty.

Seventy per cent of the poor are female, and there are twice as many women as men among the world's 900 million illiterates. In sub-Saharan Africa, where a combination of AIDS and poverty is ravaging the population, life expectancy is dropping back to levels akin to the Black Death, which afflicted feudal society in the 14th century. A baby born in Sierra Leone in 1999 can expect to live 25.9 years in good health.

The United Nations have also provided the following statistics about the state of capitalism at the beginning of the 21st century:

- Number of people currently expected to die from starvation: 900 million.
- Number of children in the world dying each year from controllable illness: 12 million.

- Number of people that die each year of preventable social causes: 10 million.
- Number of children in the world blinded yearly from lack of Vitamin A: 500 million.
- Number of children in the world that die by age 5 (yearly): 12 million.
- UN estimate of yearly expenditure on war: \$800 billion.

Poverty is caused by the means of production being used for the purpose of profit by a minority class of parasites. Poverty is the exclusion from direct access to the means of production to secure a decent living.

This definition of poverty includes most of the planet's inhabitants because poverty is sustained by and derives from the wages system. Compared to the class power and privilege of the capitalist class, the working class, no matter whether they have high or low wages, live in the developed or developing capitalist countries, live in poverty.

And defenders of capitalism say that we live in the best of all possible worlds. But if capitalism is the answer then it was a bloody stupid question. Surely Socialism must be seen as the answer to these pressing social problems?

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Socialism's Incentives - Some Questions And Answers

Thanks for replying to my questions so quickly. I have a few more though and would be very happy if you tried to answer them for me.

- When socialism is achieved, what incentives are given to the workers to keep working efficiently if money is not?
- Surely propaganda cannot just be used to do this?
- Is using propaganda deceitful - not giving your average person the wider picture?
- How does socialism use the education system? How would it be changed?
- Would it be used for the main purpose of propaganda? What subjects would be concentrated on?
- Why would socialism be effective here when it hasn't worked in other countries?
- How would socialism treat people who didn't support it?
- How would socialism provide jobs for all when some people are lazy? Wouldn't this just put extra strain on the good workers?
- How would money be used in terms of trade with non-socialist countries?

I have many more questions but this is enough for now I think. Please answer the questions directly one by one to make it clear. Please do not just send propaganda.

Thanks for your time.
Jack Little

Reply

Thank you for your interesting questions, and our apologies for being so slow in getting back to you about these. The main problem you raise is an old objection to Socialism, i.e. what about the lazy people, the greedy people, etc. Let us start with how a Socialist society would operate, on the principle of "*from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs*". Clearly there will be some people with greater needs and others whose needs are less. Likewise, not everyone will want to work flat out all the time. Indeed, in Socialism there would not normally be any need for excessively long working hours.

Consider how many jobs in capitalism are only necessary because of trade and taxes. There must be many millions of workers, worldwide, involved in accountancy, tax advice, tax officials, banking, the pensions and insurance industries, and so on. In a Socialist society, such work would no longer be needed. That would release a large part of the current workforce to do more useful work. In addition, Socialism - with no need for armed forces - would also find available a large number of those who currently either work in the armed forces or whose work - e.g. in the armaments industries - is geared to supplying the armed forces. In fact, the establishment of worldwide Socialism would mean a worldwide change in the type of work that society would find useful or necessary - including turning

swords into ploughshares, to use an old metaphor.

What this would mean is that the size of the available workforce would be greatly increased by getting rid of all the useless, unnecessary and often harmful occupations which, in capitalism, are absolutely essential. With a larger workforce, even if a minority are a bit lazy, this would hardly pose a problem. After all, in capitalism, we carry on our backs a parasitic minority class who perform no useful role at all and consume a disproportionately large portion of what we produce.

However, such a question is based on a fundamentally flawed assumption about people's attitudes to work. Even in capitalism, people do a fair amount of work on a voluntary or unpaid basis, without any monetary incentive. How many parents, up in the small hours changing babies' nappies or caring for sick children, are doing this for any financial incentive? If you ask them, they will say they do it because it has to be done and it is their responsibility.

When Socialism is established, it will be established only with the active, conscious support of an effective majority of the community. It cannot operate if that support is lacking. What this means is that by the time Socialism is established, there will be a strong sense of what is and what is not socially responsible behaviour, what is and what is not in the interest of the entire community. It follows that instances of lazy or greedy behaviour - which are all too common in capitalism - will become relatively rare in Socialism. And this would not pose much of a problem, in a society where so much unnecessary work had been got rid of. The real incentive to doing a good job and doing it well is the knowledge that the work is needed and will be useful to the community, i.e. to you and yours, and all around you. While capitalism mostly denies the worker any job-satisfaction, Socialism would enable workers to take time over their work, producing something well rather than fast.

The objection to Socialism which sees the "lazy people" as a major problem actually does say quite a lot about capitalism: that in capitalism there is thought to be only one way to get people to work - by paying them. As Carlyle noted, in capitalism the only social link is the "*cash nexus*". That "*cash nexus*" finds expression in the price tag on all commodities, from the price of a loaf of bread which makes it too expensive for the starving poor, to the rent of a room or flat which results in many workers becoming homeless.

Re your questions about the role of propaganda and education, and Socialism's treatment of those who didn't support Socialism: it seems to us that these questions are based on an assumption that Socialism would be forced on people in a top-down way. That is a common enough misunderstanding, especially since the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. As we have always argued, Socialism can only be achieved by a democratic, class-conscious majority who understand what Socialism would mean, why it is needed and how it can be established. There is no way it can be forced on an unwilling majority.

Also, we would emphasise that Socialism has not yet been established in any part of the world. The claims, both by the Kremlin and its Western 'free market' opponents, that the system in Soviet Russia, China or Cuba was 'Socialist' or 'Marxist' is bogus - an example of the sort of deceitful propaganda that you and most decent people are right to be wary of.

Our case is that a key distinguishing feature of capitalism is the wages system. So the fact that, throughout the 20th century, this system was the basis of these economies indicates that, whatever the propaganda, these countries were just as capitalist as those with private enterprise capitalism. Moreover, the experience of nationalisation in Britain and other countries was that, whether employed by private enterprise businesses or state enterprises, e.g. nationalised industries, makes no difference to workers' position as exploited wage slaves. The insecurity and the struggle to make ends meet is much the same for both.

As to how a Socialist majority, after establishing a society based on "*common ownership and democratic control of the means of producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community*", could or would deal with a minority who still refused to support this society: a lot would depend on the way such a minority chose to indicate their dislike of or opposition to Socialism. If they were simply a minor nuisance - a sort of flat-earthier group of eccentrics -, they would hardly be a problem and could be left to their own devices. After all, even capitalism tolerates - however unwillingly - the existence of drop-out communes of a minority who opt out of the capitalist rat race. Provided these are only a insignificant minority, the system can get along quite well without them.

Regarding education, in capitalism this is for the most part simply training for the job market. Dickens, in his character Gradgrind, gave a good description of how capitalism sees the function of 'education'. While Socialism will still need people to acquire skills, including science and foreign languages, it will also make it possible for people to continue their education, developing their full potential, exploring the history and culture of the world, on a free access basis. That is clearly impossible in capitalism where the question of student fees - how they and their families can be made to pay for their courses - acts as a serious disincentive to those thinking of taking a university course. Education in Socialism would - like other goods - be freely available to all on the principle of "*from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs*". It would not be, as now, rationed on the basis of ability to pay.

Finally, you asked about the role of money in trade with non-Socialist countries. Since Socialism - like capitalism - will be a global social system, there will be no non-Socialist countries. The term 'trade' implies the continuance of commodity-production and consequently of 'exchange value', as in capitalism. However, with the means of production - land, factories, mines, oil-wells etc - all being owned in common, by the whole community, so too would be the goods produced. Consequently there would no longer be any trade in such goods since trade implies that goods are owned by one person or group and exchanged for the goods (or money) of some other person or group. A society based on the whole community owning and producing in common would have no need for trade or exchange, or for money as a 'universal equivalent', a medium of exchange and a measure of exchange value.

We hope we have answered your questions adequately, and that you will not regard these answers as mere '*propaganda*' and therefore dishonest.

Capitalism Kills

The Kalashnikov is the godfather of assault rifles. Total production is estimated to be between 70 and 100 million, comprising up to 80 per cent of the total number of assault rifles in the world ... "I would prefer to have invented a machine that people could use and that would help farmers with their work - for example, a lawnmower" - Mikhail Kalashnikov, 2002.

SHATTERED LIVES, Oxfam and Amnesty International, 2003

One of the more obscene aspects of capitalism is the way it uses human ingenuity, science, technology and production to kill in more and more brutal and indiscriminate ways.

Consider the BL755 cluster bomb used in Iraq by the British forces. This bomb is dropped in clusters of 147. At the front end there is a copper cone. This collapses as the explosive of the munition detonates, producing a jet of metal which penetrates armour.

The steel body is made of notched rectangular-sectioned wire, wound into a bottle shape and brazed to form a sturdy container. When the bomblet detonates, the notched wire shatters and about two thousand sharp pieces of steel, each weighing about a tenth of a gram, are projected sideways and rearwards.

The result is that these steel fragments slice through human bodies inflicting pain, agony, mutilation and for the fortunate, a quick death.

All this violence to protect raw resources, strategic points of interest and trade routes.

In a socialist society without nation states, international rivalry and conflict, social ingenuity and the means of production would be used to preserve human life rather than end it violently in a brutal, barbaric and inhumane way.

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Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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